562 "The killer? (It was) your husband;
602 The victim? (It was) your brother.
[539] Great is your pain,
never will it leave your house"

(said to a woman who promoted her husband's interests, e.g. in competition for a position with the feudal lord, over that of her brother).

562 Psychological inferiority is ascribed to all women, by Amhara men, regardless of social rank. Her weakness is regarded as biological, intellectual and moral. It is regarded as proverbial:

[98] "Vulgar Language" - "yäsyēt qwanqwa" (lit. woman's language)

"Polite Language" - "yäwänd qwanqwa" (lit. man's language); modest, correct, pure, elegant language. Also called "yäwond amarēña" (lit. man's Amharic).

[195] "syeto" - insult to a talkative man. (lit. womanish
"syētē" - (lit. female) - said of timber or soil that is feeble, soft, of little resistance.

[539] "Woman and donkey
(must be trained) with a stick."

"Even if a woman has knowledge,
(only a) man knows how to hold on to it."

212 Communication among the Amhara can be said to be formal on all
195 matters of culture focus. Writing is regarded by the Amhara as relegated to formal use, and schoolboys were penalized for experimenting with it informally. Language, however, being oral and thus less controllable, compensates for this; and artistic expression and experimentation make free and often playful and inventive use of the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical raw material of language.

A. The Raw Material of the Amharic Language Put to Use.

a) Historical Development

197 Much of the lexical matter and most of the grammar of the Amharic language, also the basis of the alphabet that it uses, are derived from Geez, one of the South Arabian languages of about 500 B.C. The term "lasana Geez" the language of the Geez, has, among Abyssinians, the connotation of "language of the free men", i.e. conquerors. Linguistic scholars have raised the question whether one single language, Geez, was imported from Southern Arabia about that time, or whether different, possibly related, languages came from there via separate channels at different times. The latter theory seems more likely, and Amharic may owe the Semitic part of its character to a sister language of Geez, rather than to Geez itself (footnote 85). But the Amhara firmly believe in the derivation from Geez itself - and directly.

197 Whether directly or indirectly derived originally, certain it is
192 that for many centuries and quite consciously even today, the Amhara have been borrowing freely and proudly from the Geez language any term useful particularly to express abstract concepts, in which Amharic is

Footnote 85 - Theory of Professor Marcel Cohen, quoted by Leslau Archaic Features in South Ethiopia. (See Bibliography).

492

192 "kul kul" - to call the chickens. (Footnote 87)

"fwa fwa" - cascade, waterfall.

"täb alä" - drop by drop ("alä", lit. he went, is the common auxiliary).

"täf täf alä" - poured liquid from a narrow-necked bottle.

"twa alä" - water falling on fire.

"cha alä" - became silent, tranquil, calm; hence - deserted village (1)

"chechch alä" - began to chant; hence - birds in the morning (Twitter).

"gwaqa alä" - knocked loudly at door

"kof kof alä"- marched with gravity (sound of shoes).

"encheq alä" - (sound of) picking feet from muddy place.

"aguramarrana" - murmured (sound of large drum), hence - rolling thunder, and incipient rebellion.

"anchabächchäta" - clapped hands rythmically, to keep time for music, or to greet a "great man" (Africa style).

"andagaddaga" - made gluglu (water through pipe).

193 Grammar, called "sonsso" or "säwasew", is mastered only by the
●195 traditional-educated church scholars ("mämher") and a few members of
554 noble families. Perhaps only a few hundred individuals master all its intricacies. Emperor Haile Selassie's speeches strike the average

[192] Footnote 87 - Other calls to animals include:
"Kulel Kulel" - to call lost donkey at night.
"Kes Kes" - (or "cheg") to drive sheep on
"Kis Kis" - to drive calves on.
"Buch Buch" - call to dogs.
"Wush" - to drive loaded donkeys from path, so the master can ride through
"Che" or "Mich" - to get a horse or mule started when riding it.

193 Amhara layman as esoteric and hard to understand - which causes them to
195 be respected all the more. "Soasso" literally means "ladder" in t he
554 Geez language, and the study of grammar is regarded as "uplifting", steps on the ladder of knowledge, achievable fully only by the few, but respected almost as an end in itself.

193 Special features of this grammar are the following: There is no present tense, and the future tense is used also to indicate the present, as in other Semitic languages. A completed action, in the sense of a "present that has become a past" is expressed by a gerund compound tense. Frequentatives, i.e. reduplicated syllables, are much used to indicate reiterative, intensive, augmentative and attenuative action; foreign scholars believe them to be of Cushitic origin (Footnote 87). Possessive pronouns often take the form of infixes. Among noteworthy absences in this grammar are: No male or female genders, though sex distinctions are made even in concepts of inanimate objects.

There are no "cases" in the Latin sense. There are no subjunctives. The passive and reciprocal voices take the same form, though the meanings are distinguished. A complexity that never fails to complicate matters for non-Amharic speakers (other Ethiopians as well as foreigners) is the gemination, the duplication of a number of consonants, "lala", which gives the word another meaning entirely because it changes the basic stem. The basic stem of verbs is most often a Semitic "triliteral", but through loss or gain is often changed to a "biliteral" or "quadriliteral".

The syntax of Amharic is regarded by foreign scholars as basically Cushitic, much like the vocabulary, and unlike its grammar (Footnote 88).

Footnote 87 - Leslau: Le Thème Verbal Frequentative dans les Langues Etiopiens.
Revue des Etudes Semitiques, I, PP. 15-31. Paris, 1939.

Footnote 88 - Leslau: The Influence of Cushitic on the Semitic Languages of Ethiopia. (in) Word, 1945, pp. 54-62.

538 He was a master of "sowasse"; of the pun which utilizes gemina-
522 tion and other grammatical possibilities to make an ironic observation and befuddle the unwary, so that they become public laughing stocks. Sometimes the joke was on his own Rabelaisian appetites in food and sex. More often he spoofed the pompousness of feudal and even royal powers, their love for amassing rules and regulations for their courts; and the pretended puritan piety of the priests, behind which facade he recognized witty insight into the minds of men, whose salty comments and behavior in private life he liked to burlesque. For example:

[539] "One day the servant of a witty priest suffered from a chigger (sandflea) embedded in his foot. The priest pried it out with a pin and threw it into the fire. A friend, watching this, objected jokingly, saying: "Why did you do this? May it not multiply in the fire?" Replied the priest: "It may be warmed, but not 'done up' ("yäzarräw" - also means begotten through sexual intercourse)."

Amhara listeners find such "impolite" stories extremely amusing.

• 195 The Amhara people recognize the esoteric use that can be made of
198 their language, and they utilize this. Hence the expression "he is talking Amarinya", meaning "he is speaking in esoteric ways", with double meanings, hidden meanings, to becloud his real purpose so that he cannot be accused of lying and can say later that he meant something else. For example, the verb "qanna" can have the following meanings:

was right, direct, correct
was honest, just
succeeded, prospered
became jealous, envious
became zealous, fanatic, intolerant.

198 Certain occupational specialties have traditionally made use of

576 Politeness is not considered "common", but differentiates most sharply between the behavior and expected behavior of the noble "great man" (tälläq säw) and the rustic (balägär). The "great man", noble is expected to show graciousness, noblesse oblige. When a social inferior tries to kiss his feet, it is gracious to chuck him under the chin so as not to let him reach the feet, so that the kiss lands on the [593] master's knee. Fathers or mothers imitate this same etiquette when their sons, arriving or departing, try to kiss their feet in symbolic etiquette of subordination. The motion is smooth and evidently routine and well-practiced.

● 195 Stylistic distinctions in the speech pattern also differ between expected etiquette of a noble and rustic. It is noble to talk slowly, softly, choosing words with unworried deliberation, which indicates to the listener that the noble, a man of few and calm words, is secure in his rank and position, and does not have to worry about possible results of poor communication. A noble uses soft-and-polite language (a unified concept to the Amhara), called "yäwätalanät negegär", showing good judgement and taste ("yäluñeta"). But his softness of speech has a firm and impressive quality, referred to as "läza mälkam" (lit. good tongue).

576 It is the mark of a social parvenue of "low" ancestry, if he struts ("tälattätä") with an upward-turned face, and is too proud to reply politely when addressed politely. A true noble, though he will not dismount from his mule when greeted by a commoner on foot (as he would to a social equal or superior), will raise his hat a bit, or raise his toga a bit, in reply to a greeting, in which the commoner has removed from his head his toga protection from the sun.

A social inferior may not sit down in the company of seated "great men" until invited to do so twice. He is expected to be ready to join

576 the retinue of the great man, to serve as messenger, whenever the "great man" decides to go anywhere. When the great man graciously extends his hand in greeting, the social subordinate takes it lightly into his two cupped hands as if it were a precious gift, a "gursha", and permits the hand to be withdrawn soon; for the extended handholding is limited to social equals. The great man is addressed as "getoch" (lit. "masters", using the plural). When appearing before a great man, the toga ("shamma") is redraped in the fashion of appearing before the feudal lord or king, leaving the upper part of the body bare (or nowadays, covered by another garment) in a gesture of self-abasement. Bowing is from the hip, both in case of individuals and by the population at large when the "great man" passes in public.

However, self-abasement among the Amhara is not supposed to be carried to extremes, in their opinion. It does happen that an old rustic ("balagar") will show great servility (resembling that of Uncle Tomism of American Southern states). But this is quietly mocked by other onlooking Amhara commoners. Such a "balagar" may, e.g. throw his toga off his own shoulders and spread it on the ground for a bishop or other great man to walk on, later treasuring the footprints. But it is considered etiquette, especially by young church students and other youngsters, to carry the sandals of adults or priests when they are taken off before entering church.

576 195 It is the mark of the rustic (illiterate) if he is careless in the requirements of polite etiquette, for while the speech pattern of the noble is not expected of him (and would be considered affected, and is therefore never used), he is expected to remember that even he is an Amhara, and therefore somewhat "noble". He will be mocked and criticized for frequent impoliteness, such as using the term "enja" (lit. I don't know) which has the connotation of "... and I don't care", instead of the polite "alawqum" (lit. "it has not entered me", i.e. I don't

576 therefore, know). Abusing people with vulgar insults ("läddäfa")
195 tends to reflect on the abuser, so that he is considered "belgena", a rude person. Such a person speaks in high-pitched, strident style, to commoners; while to social superiors he fawns and wheedles, using baby-talk such as "abbabba" (daddy) to a lord and "ammanna" or "tatay" (mummy) to a lady, in mournful tones of self-abasement and utter helplessness, begging paternal protection and forgiveness as if he were an infant that had not yet reached the "age of reason".

576 This is mocked, for the Amhara distinguishes between such servility and non-servile gestures of subordination, such as the "gursha", the bowing from the hip, and the walking backwards when departing from
[#6] the king. Servants and other employees may indicate dissatisfaction at being short-changed, by bowing not quite so deeply the next time, whereupon a wise lord or employer will take a cue, increase the wage, and see it acknowledged by a specially deep bow or knee-kiss. Otherwise, protest will take the form of "murmuring", a semi-articulate protest which may lead to open rebellion.

576 Kinship terms are sometimes employed, outside the kin context,
601 to communicate respective positions in a situation of differential social status. Thus, it is respectful to address a status superior as "ayya" (lit. "my dear elder"), used to the father or elder brother. The extension of this term is fairly recent, in line with improved communication and transportation, but the rustic still uses the more ancient version, "ayya", (which has the same meaning). Because of this, a wit who does not want to address a rustic as "ato" (Mister), sometimes addresses the ignoramus, in mock respect, as "ayya". (This cheats him out of his "entitles", reminiscent of the use of the address "Doc" by Southern Whites to Negroes, avoiding "Mister")

576 The speech pattern and etiquette to be expected from women,
195 nearly all of whom are illiterate and have no formal education, is
562

576 195 562 classified by Amhara men in the category of the "balagar"; as high-pitched, strident, alternately vulgar and wheedling. The term for female, "syēt", also means inconsistent. A woman's voice is not regarded as "soft", which concept is regarded as identical with "polite" and associated with "noble". Noblewomen are considered exempt from this rustic pattern of womanhood, and are expected to behave in accordance with "nobility".

b) Greetings and Address.

576 Formality in interpersonal relations is emphasized in greetings, forms of address, postures and gestures, sometimes in considerable detail and variety, since formal politeness is a culture focus among the Amhara.

Distinctions are made even in familiar address. Thus there are two ways of saying "thou": "antī" - to a child, social inferior, or semi-jokingly to emphasize intimate friendship to a social equal;

"antu" - polite "thou", used to older sibling, or by wife to respected husband.

The polite form utilises the plural in address; and, in the case of pronouns, the third person plural. Hence :

"gētoch" - (lit. masters), polite address to employer

"antu" - (thou) polite-familiar address.

"ersu" or "erswo" - (lit. he), polite "you" (singular) to male.

"erswa" - (lit. she) " " " to female.

"ersachāw" - (lit. they) " " (plural), but also used as extremely polite singular address to lord.

The use of the plural communicates that the person addressed is worth several times as much, in material or spiritual worth, as an average person.

514

524 Boys, from the "age of reason" onward, tease each other with riddles in endless inventive games, such as:

539 "(Question)": "In its youth, white hair,
in its maturity, brown,
in its old age, red.
What is it?"

"(Reply)": "Wot". (Red-golden peppersauce).

538 Like medieval bards, Amhara entertainers (azmari) and talented individuals tell of incredible and wonderful happenings of all kinds, stories called "tarik" (synonymous, in Amharic, with history). Often these use as their base historical or pseudo-historical events, and expand on them, experimenting with persons, plots, additional details, etc. Very popular bases are the Royal Chronicles of Abyssinia, "tarik nägäst", fanciful stories about Alexander the Great, and Biblical plots, especially Apocryphal.

D. Artistic Expression: The Art of Insult and Mockery.

195 578 A person who is clever at the art of insult is given grudging admiration even by his opponents, and is called "bälalay lachä" (lit. one who shaves with his tongue). He can insult or mock so subtly that he may leave non-initiates in doubt, yet have full effect on the victim. On the other hand, a coarse person who insults people indiscriminately, regardless of propriety of person or circumstance, is despised ("zärta af").

Mockery is sometimes used for positive as well as negative purposes, especially in pedagogy, but insults are always more or less negative. Mockery, if used to teach a lesson, often employs proverbs; 578 using metaphors, so that the person criticized must think - which 195 might lead to his mending his ways:

539 To mock a useless act: "(it is like) a comb on a shaven head, (like) trousers to carry dung in".

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

To mock false pride:

"A blind man, when he became (too) proud, (to accept help) on his toga defecated".

To mock aggressiveness beyond social station, especially in a young man:

"The mouse that wants to die,
goes to touch the nose of the cat".

Insults, however, do not have this benevolent, educative quality. Instead, they are antagonistic - though in carefully differentiated degrees. In general, an insult may be extremely severe, severe, medium severe, or light, in degree. Insults are considered of greater weight when directed at persons of higher status, (more severe).

There are two major categories of insults:

a) Insults directed at the group to which the insulted person belongs: his racial (usually slave-descent); religious (non-Coptic); ethnic (linguistic-regional) stereotype.

b) Insults directed at his individual personality shortcomings, intended to shame him for having failed to measure up to what is expected of him in society.

Racial insults commonly include:

"shembora ras" (lit. peahead, i.e. peppercorn hair) or "barya täg̈ur" (slave hair), both severe insults referring to slave ancestry, by reference to hair typical of the Shanqalla (negroid tribe in the border lowland). This is now a jail offense.

"täq̈wara" (lit. dark one). Light insult directed at Shanqalla ex-slave, teasingly.

"wellaj" (half-slave). Severe insult, directed at a person of doubtful ancestry.

Religious insults; often involved also in ethnic insults:

"afotam" (lit. sheathed, encased) - uncircumcised. Directed at "pagan" lowlanders, and lower ethnic castes such as the "Faqi" tanners. Medium severe.

195
578 "kaffir" (infidel). Insult used by islanized Abyssinians and Arabs against Coptic Abyssinians. Severe insult which may lead to bloodshed.

"Koyte" - has the connotation of "one who will eat anything". Refers to the hippopotamus hunters on Lake Tana and the lower Blue Nile. Medium severe insult. (People who subsist on hunting are despised.)

There is also a whispered insult relating to supernatural black magic, "buda", used against persons accused of descent from ironsmiths (e.g. Falasha).

b) Insults directed against individual shortcomings include:

Weak, soft, womanish (directed at a man):

"syēto" - womanish. Directed at chattering male. Medium severe.

"lämata syēt" (lit. begging woman). Severe. Directed at flatterer and feigner.

"duretan" (lit. full of flour), suggesting that he is a coward, who would prefer woman's work, such as grinding, to male behavior.

Generally unsteady character:

"zïlïbabeda" - unsteady person. Severe insult.

"jebrarra" - childish, silly jabberer, or a drunk. Severe insult for a man.

"bäsedeb zärrätta" - speechless, e.g. man who cannot reply to insult.

"arho" (lit. wandering minstrel woman), prey to many evils. Medium severe.

"zïmmatta" - vagabond, loafer. Medium severe.

Mannish (directed at a woman):

"wändïmända" - Severe insult directed at a shrewish, aggressive woman.

● 195 578 Stupidity:

"dängwore"(lit. deaf). Fool. Frequently used. Medium to severe.

"dengay ras" (lit. stone head). Slow-witted person. Light insult if directed at a youngster, medium toward low-prestige adult, severe toward other adult males.

Laziness:

"zefeq" - Medium severe insult, directed at woman who evades her chores, and who dresses in her best embroidered toga on a weekday.

Hypocrisy:

"zemban ïeba" (lit. thief with eyes full of flies): Directed at cunning man who pretends not to see but looks out to take what he should not; like a "blind" thief in the night. Medium severe.

"wäïratta" - vain flatterer, good-for-nothing. Severe insult.

Bastard:

"men abbatu" (lit. who is his father). Very frequently used especially by lower class, even against balky mules to "let off steam", but nevertheless considered very severe insult.

Grossness:

"ïahamus fetrat" (lit. Creature of Thursday; i.e. the day the animals were created). Directed at animal-like behavior. Severe insult.

Supernatural insult:

"gänänam" - full of evil spirits. Severe insult.

Insults of category a) may lead to serious brawls, even kin feuds, for insults against the group are regarded as affecting also the following generations:

[539] "(If the father is hated), the child will not be kissed, when he (the child) speaks, no one will smile".

195 578 Insults of category b) however, may be noisy, sound violent, involve much high-pitched repartee, with the adversaries screaming at each other. But since such individual insults are regarded as a "battle of wits", they rarely even lead to fisticuffs, though, to foreign observers, such encounters seem only a hair's breadth removed from serious bloodshed, and the adversaries seem to lean against each other physically (though now actually). For, even a severe insult is not regarded as a "fighting word", rather as an almost theatrical, almost ceremonial exchange. There may be much waving of a corner of a toga in the opponent's face, as in court. The exchange may end in mutual exhaustion, physically and nervously. The entertainment aspect is not lost on the onlookers, who thoroughly enjoy this and egg on [892] the adversaries. Sometimes curbstone arbitrators ("astaraqi") are appointed to act as "peacemakers".

[554] A person of nobility is not supposed to engage in such public battles of insult, rather employs subtle means of implied antagonism. Even a commoner Amhara may imitate the indirect behavior pattern in a situation of antagonism, e.g. to indicate to a neighbor that he is not wanted, yet without letting the public know it (thus saving face for the neighbor). He may invite him, greet him politely, ask him to wait (standing) while stools "will be brought". When no stools are brought, after some time, the neighbor leaves, never to return. The proverb says:

[539] "So that he will not talk (against us), invite him;
(yet) so that he will not eat, move him about".

In this manner, polite antagonism is indicated, without making a public enemy.

201 [177] 521

has been introduced only since the Italian occupation.

The gesture indicating sour-bitter taste (which are not differentiated; and collectively called "närara"), consists of slowly shaking the head sideways ("täŋgäshaggäsha"); sometimes reinforced by the verbal exclamation of pain, "ayye" or "hayy!".

516 Postures differentiate between the status of the master and that of the servant. The master indicates his "free" status by sitting way back on the stool or bench, straight, in a position which would require special effort to rise and therefore emphasizes that he does not expect to have to jump up at anyone's command. A servant may not sit in presence of the master, or must sit lightly so as to be ready to perform any duty for which he may be called upon at any moment. To indicate respect, a servant carries out his duties on the run (as "on the double" in the Western armies), while the master is present.

The correct posture in sitting is called "kurkum alä", sitting "folded up"; the legs bent at the knees, the feet far back and partly hidden, since it is "rude" to sit with legs stretched out beyond the knee. But the thighs may be spread, especially when seated on a mat on the ground, even in the case of peasant women who wear the anklelength, heavy cotton gown. To sit with legs crossed (Turkish fashion) is frowned upon as the posture of "barya", the Muslim or "pagan" ex-slaves from the Sudan; considered a rude and lazy position by the Amhara. The proper posture of the Amhara, if seated on the ground, is a squatting position, on the hips, never on the heels; feet flat on the ground, knees high and spread, the toga arranged so as to cover the knees and shins even when jodphurs are worn.

201 554 Facial expression of a high-status Amhara (noble, priest, elder) assumes a stoic appearance. The jaw muscles are relaxed, the mandible slightly dropped, the eyes half-closed but alert, breathing very quiet, [195] the voice in even tone (in contrast to the strident whine of the argumentative peasant-gabbar).

X794 of Lady Salamtew's body. The twisting began like an embrace, with her
796 head thrown back, rotating movements of the chest, followed by a
756 rythmic forward bump of belly and hips. Her ecstatic shrieks varied
781 from pain to exultation (like the "ellel" of women in the Coptic church service). Encouraging shouts came from individual women in the audience, and some raised their holiday - reddened palms in prayerful joy. As the climax approached, the jerky twisting of Lady Salamtew's body gradually changed to smoother movements of the limbs. She was now well in tune with her zar, and he was comfortable within her. The excitement in the audience changed to warm and glowing emotion at the same time. Then Lady Salamtew emitted a loud scream, and dropped in a heap. The drum stopped abruptly. There was a sudden hush in the audience. The strong sweet odor of generously burned incense pervaded the consciousness and its smoke leisurely curled upward.

X794 It was only a matter of minutes before Lady Salamtew recovered.
756 Her brother pulled the curtain to one side. Her eyes were bright with
796 curiosity as she glanced about the house as if she had just arrived. She had lost her absent-minded appearance, for now the zar acted and spoke through her. Suddenly she appeared to notice the foreigner for the first time, smiled and waved a friendly greeting. Her voice was still husky, but warm, as she called out "how are you" in understandable Amharic, rather than her esoteric "zar language"; this was a courtesy, though
● [195] she used the female familiar gender (the zar often uses the inverted
[123] genders in address). She further inquired whether the foreigner was sitting in comfort, and how his health was today (hinting at the "ailments" he had used as a pretext). Then she ordered the handmaidens to offer the foreigner talla (barley beer), and coffee, on one of the zar coffee trays.

640

*794 782 796 The poet now lures the "pagan" zar Gamyu, whose home is in a bamboo forest in the Metemma lowland of the eastern escarpment of Ethiopia.

Poet: "Tall bamboo you (lit. he) will eat; bamboo you will devour;
Lord, named "Dämmäna" (lit. cloud), from where you devour bamboo;
Gamyu, Gamyu, Gamyu, pure honey (flattering synonym for healer) I
dance eyaho, eyaho dance, Oh Gamyu!"

Thereupon one of the women devotees who has shaved a tonsure in the center of her skull ("Gamyu" comes from "gamye", meaning tonsure), which is the visible requirement he makes of those whom he "possesses", begins to rise. The "gurri" she dances differs only in details from the one performed for the Galla zar spirits.

It is now 11:00 P.M. The various male zars expected on the program for the evening have now "descended". It is time for the female zars to begin making their descent, which is safe, now that many protective male zars are about.

*794 796 781 Word is whispered around that a male and a female zar who "will bite" are about to attack some of the possessed. Everyone rises and crowds close to the wall, leaving the hearth and the center of the room free. Only Lady Salämtew seems unafraid. She calls out a warning to the [124] foreigner, in her husky voice but in friendly tone, advising him to stand on the bench so as not to be bitten. "Ayzäw" (be well, be of good courage, be of good cheer) she calls out to the foreigner, using the [125] polite address, and forgetting to use the familiar 2nd person singular feminine, which is her privilege.

This time the possession begins differently. Two women detach themselves from the frightened crowd almost simultaneously. Both

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181 strained behavior, civilization, but which now has assumed the con-
178 notation of "modern" in the Western sense. It includes the improved
562 status of the woman, no longer a mere hewer of wood and hauler of water; and it even became formalized in 1942 when an imperial proclamation, in establishing a Consultative Committee on Legislation, gave instruction to draft new laws that would be "not repugnant to natural justice and humanity".

178 But many old values still persist even at the apex of the
576 hierarchy where the prime "change agent", the emperor, resides. Most
644 notable, to foreign observers, is the continuation of the "daj tenat" (faire l'antechambre: lit. waiting at the gate). This is the traditional palace courtyard ceremony of bowing to the emperor at least twice a week. Emperor Haile Selassie has permitted this institution to continue. Every governor-general has his own "daj tenat" court when he returns to his provincial capital; and so on down the line.

195 The traditional oath on the king's life, sworn even in petty matters and everyday affairs ("Hayle Selassye yemut", lit. May the emperor die; i.e. if I lie) is still in common use and no attempt has been made to suppress or reduce its usage. Haile Selassie well remembers that during the first half of his reign his Amhara subjects still used to swear by the name of the dead Menelik or by provincial dynasts such as Ras Ouosa.

178 Outlook: the "culture lag" between material and non-material culture that has created so many social problems in so many parts of the present-day world has not yet taken place in this society. The old attitude of accepting and enjoying trade goods without trying to reproduce what the foreigner has created, still persists. Direct exploitation of what nature provides still fills most physi-

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[For additional information on the "wax and gold" poetic formula, see categories 19, 196 and 538.]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

words often carry *double-entendre* as a matter of course; when he listens, he is ever on the lookout for latent meanings and hidden motives. As one of my Ethiopian colleagues has said: "Wax and gold is anything but a formula—it is a way of life."

In essence, wax and gold is simply a more refined and stylized manifestation of the Amhara's basic manner of communicating. This manner is indirect, often secretive. Amharic conversation is larded with vague remarks like *Mīn yeshālāl?* ("What is better?") when the speaker has failed to indicate what is the issue at hand, or *Tādyās!*, an interjection which can mean almost anything. Often, when the speaker is then quizzed about the issue at hand, he will give an answer that does not reveal what is really on his mind at all, and even when he does, the person with whom he is talking is likely to interpret his response as a disguise.

Wax and gold embodies this fundamental indirection in speech by means of the studied use of ambiguity. Apart from its literary and religious manifestations, wax and gold appears in the common life of the traditional Amhara on a variety of occasions and serves a number of diverse functions.

It provides the medium for an inexhaustible supply of humor, among a wry people who prefer the clever, double-edged remark to comic actions or incongruous situations. This includes the wit of daily life—the invention of puns and sly retorts, the telling and retelling of good anecdotes and famous lines—as well as the more formalized humor on festive occasions, where minstrels sing the *sam-ennā warq* verses extemporized by the guests.

It provides a means for insulting one's fellows in a socially approved manner, in a culture which requires fastidious etiquette in social relations and punishes direct insults by heavy fines. *Sam-ennā warq* insulting, too, has its more stylized expressions, as at the drink-house, where one may find persons competing in a prolonged exchange of more or less disguised insults, or in time of political or military conflict, when opposing lords were wont formerly to satirize one another with ambiguous couplets.

It provides a technique for defending the sphere of privacy against excessive intrusion, in a social order that thrives on rumor and gossip and puts most of its people at the mercy of superiors. While vague and evasive responses often suffice to dampen the enthusiasm of the tax collector or the curious neighbor, *sam-ennā warq* constitutes another potent weapon of self-defense.

Finally, it provides the one outlet for criticism of authority figures in a society which strictly controls every kind of overt aggression toward authority, be it parental, religious, or political. Thus it has been a safety valve for certain social tensions, enabling, for example, witty individuals to satirize the monarch himself and still live to repeat the witticism—so long as its subject was himself duly appreciative of the cleverness of the lines.

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TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Insofar as Ethiopia is committed to the pursuit of modernity, she cannot fail to be embarrassed to some extent by the wax-and-gold complex. For nothing could be more at odds with the ethos of modernization, if not with its actuality, than a cult of ambiguity.[9]

It is true, of course, that cultural formations analogous to wax and gold in their exploitation of ambiguity have been prominent throughout the history of the West, not to mention the whole non-Western world. The Christian tradition has always made much of parables and allegories. The classical teaching of rhetoric, following Cicero, placed great stress on the use of paradox; and a major philosophical tradition, stretching from Plato to Marx, has been founded on a logic which assumes that reality can be known only by combining opposite concepts and that any single term is subject to dual interpretation. The flowering of symbolist literature, to take a more recent example, created an audience as partial to subtle allusion and *double-entendre* as the most obscurantist proponent of *weṣṭa wayrā*.

Yet there can be little doubt that the pace-setting spirit of modern Western culture rests on a commitment to unambiguous communication. It is predicated on the proposition that A must be A or not be A. It was no accident that one of the more characteristic philosophical movements of the present century, logical positivism, should have had as its primary motif the desire to maximize precision in the use of language. For the decisive institutions of the modern world—technologies based on logico-experimental science, rational legal systems, and bureaucratic organizations in government, commerce, and industry—depend intimately on the unambiguous definition of terms and the utmost clarity of expression. Whether the task be one of constructing a legal contract, outlining a job description, designing a nuclear reactor, classifying genera and species, or defining variables and their interrelations, these characteristic modern activities are informed by the need and intention to eliminate, as far as possible, all traces of linguistic ambiguity.

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The incorporation of these aspects of modern culture into Ethiopian life must inevitably produce a certain amount of strain in a culture which makes such thoroughgoing use of analogy and equivocation. Indeed, tension generated by this issue has been manifest in a variety of ways. Among the modern-educated Ethiopians, one finds demands for greater clarity in the specification of responsibilities in administration. One finds increased impatience with the devious, equivocal talk involved in joint action of any sort. One finds a slowly growing disposition to structure and fulfil expectations in literal terms, and occasional outbursts of protest against the vagueness and the conspiratorial mentality of those schooled only in the traditional way. In order to escape what they feel are the burdensome subtleties of Amharic,

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some Ethiopians prefer to speak in English in their offices. An alternative solution is proffered by those Amharic writers and journalists who have attempted to adapt Amharic to the modern idiom, replacing the florid, intricate sentence of yore with short, simple, straightforward declarative sentences —an effort that parallels changes in other countries, such as Japan, where an intrinsically more ambiguous language than Amharic in the traditional culture has been revised to facilitate more precise modes of expression.[10]

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The opposition between the wax-and-gold complex and the rationalistic aspects of modern culture which some Ethiopians now seek to assimilate is of interest here as an instance of the more general phenomenon toward which this book as a whole is oriented. It is the dilemma posed in all the nations of Asia and Africa by the confrontation of their traditional cultures with their rather recently activated modernist aspirations. To study what is transpiring in these nations in terms of the encounter between tradition and modernity, rather than in terms of the more bland and less biased category of social change, is to focus our attention on a very important aspect of their actual situation: many members of these societies have suddenly been forced to grapple with a number of intellectual and moral dilemmas of great magnitude. The concepts of tradition and modernity are symbols to which they are more or less passionately attached. All of them have concepts symbolizing the sanctity of tradition, like the Amharic *hāymānot abāw* ("faith of the fathers"); and all have concepts symbolizing the goal of modernity, like the Amharic *selṭānē* ("civilization"). And in all these nations the conflict between the two sorts of orientation has produced acute forms of disorientation, on the one hand, and extraordinary challenges to creativity, on the other.

Adopting this perspective for the study of "transitional" societies probably opens the door more widely than usual for the intrusion of the biases of the observer. For the observer's own attitudes regarding tradition and modernity naturally affect the order of questions he will ask and the kinds of data he will examine in making his analysis of the "actual situation." They influence, for example, how much attention he pays to the weakening of norms governing traditional kinship systems and whether he views this primarily as a form of social disorganization or primarily as a precondition for more effective societal organization. Accordingly it is fitting that we introduce the analyses to be presented below with a brief statement of the philosophy which guides the author's approach to these questions. This may be done most effectively by surveying the range of positions that might be taken. In considering the encounter between traditional and modern culture patterns currently experienced in acute form in most nations of the world, one may discern, at a high level of abstraction, these five positions: (1) the Traditionalist, (2) the Modernist, (3) the Skeptic, (4) the Conciliatory, and (5) the Pragmatist.

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gest that it also reflects certain psychological and social characteristics deeply rooted in the culture of the land of wax and gold. These characteristics will be the subject of analysis in the two concluding chapters, which deal, respectively, with the phenomena of orality and of individualism in Amhara culture.

It should be evident from the foregoing that I have refrained from attempting a comprehensive assessment of the relationship between Amhara tradition and Ethiopia's modernization. By limiting myself to problems for which I had both prior theoretical interests and data obtained at first hand, I have sought to gain in accuracy of detail and depth of understanding what I might lose in breadth of coverage. It is hoped, moreover, that these studies may stimulate other scholars to extend this mode of analysis into such crucial areas as law, economic behavior, family life, religion, and military institutions.

On the other hand, by treating the relation between tradition and modernity as it appears in a variety of social and cultural phenomena rather than by concentrating on a single problem, I have found it easier to articulate some of the complexities of that relation. For traditional patterns and modern aspirations are related in many ways. Oftentimes they are fully compatible, the traditional either positively supporting the modern or else presenting no conflict with it. When conflict does obtain, on the other hand, it may work toward resolution in a number of different ways. One alternative is straightforward displacement of the old by the new, through a varying combination of coercive and persuasive measures. Another alternative is through structural differentiation, as mentioned above, either through the incorporation of a novel form from outside or through processes of internal differentiation. Still another way is through a subtle transformation of traditional forms so that they continue to be meaningful but are redefined to fit the modern situation. In its most creative outcome, the conflict may involve so genuine a dialogue between traditional and modern patterns that novel values emerge and authentic variants of modern culture are developed.

Perhaps the most important insight in this connection is that while traditional patterns may stand in conflict with modernity in some respects, the same patterns may support modernity in other respects. It is to this sort of complex relationship that the Pragmatist is most likely to draw attention. Theoretically the relationship follows logically from the realization, hard won by sociologists during recent decades, that no modern society can exist without substantial reliance on patterns which must be regarded as traditional and not rational. For a concrete example of this dual relationship, let us turn once more to the phenomenon previously discussed, that of wax and gold.

We have argued that the ambiguity and equivocation symbolized by the Amharic formula wax and gold stands in opposition to the semantic dimen-

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sion of modernization which, because of the ascendance of technology, contractual relations, and bureaucratic organization places great stress on the unambiguous use of language. Yet we may now argue that the intellectual habits associated with the wax-and-gold pattern are also valuable assets in Ethiopia's pursuit of modernity.

The experience of history has demonstrated the futility of attempting the revolutionary implementation of a clear and distinct ideal in human society. No matter how bold and sweeping the program, traditional patterns persist tenaciously. The only real alternatives are whether they are to be maintained in isolation from the modern culture, or whether traditional and modern patterns can be fused sufficiently to produce a relatively homogeneous sort of culture. As Gabriel Almond's analysis suggests, the latter alternative appears to be conducive to stability and effectiveness in modern political systems.[12] For that to take place, however, traditional symbols must be interpreted with sufficient ambiguity as to permit their fusion with modern ones. The problems of "cultural management" faced by the elites of the transitional nations can only be handled in the long run by a deliberate effort to exploit the ambiguity of traditional symbols.

Enrico Cerulli's interpretation of the Aksumite inscriptions provides an interesting precedent for such manipulation of language in the service of induced culture change in Ethiopia.[13] Cerulli has remarked on the cautious and ambiguous language with which Emperor Ēzānā recorded his conversion to Christianity in the fourth century. For example, Ēzānā refers to his new deity, not as "God of the Christians," but with the traditional pagan symbolism, "God of the Heaven" and "God of the Earth"; and he attaches to his new God the same epithet—"Who has not been conquered by enemies"—which traditionally belonged to the pagan god Mahrem. So interpreted, Ēzānā's inscription may be seen as an antique expression of that cultural disposition which centuries later the Amhara were to crystallize in the canons of *sam-ennā warq* poesy. At the same time it illustrates how the sacred symbols of a traditional culture may be used to facilitate radical innovation.

What is true at the level of national leadership is no less true for the leadership of less inclusive social systems. Wise politicians at all levels have always been aware that to gain support and preserve solidarity it is not advisable to adhere scrupulously to a single literal interpretation of any system of beliefs or code of norms. This perception has been affirmed by recent sociological investigations, which show that the most effective administrators of complex organizations are those who have a high tolerance of ambiguity and who are skilled in the use of ambiguous language for the purpose of reducing interpersonal tensions.

In addition to serving these instrumental functions, the ambiguous use of language belongs in the most modern of cultures because it is the foundation

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of a humane literary style. The rationalist emphasis on clear and distinct ideas and the puritanical emphasis on honest, straightforward, and plain talk are indispensable in running the machinery of modern society but by themselves are insufficient to represent the savor of human experience. The ascendance of unambiguous communication in American culture has resulted in the triumph of "a journalese," which is characterized, as one critic has put it, by "words of flat signification . . . and with none of the broadly ruminative phrases which have the power to inspire speculation." As he further observes:

> The essential sterility of such a style is one of the surest signs we have that modern man is being dessicated. For the "modern" style is at once brash and timid: brash enough to break old patterns without thinking, and timid before the tremendous evocative and constructive powers immanent in language.[14]

If the aim of modern culture is a fuller life for man, it neglects its ends if strictly cognitive and instrumental considerations become so dominant that its very matrix becomes flat and dry. For modernity to be complete, the tremendous evocative powers immanent in language must also be unleashed.

The distrust of ambiguity arises in a modernizing society because those processes most obviously associated with the culture of modernity—chiefly those having to do with rational mastery over the environment and the rational co-ordination of human activities—take place in contexts where unambiguous communication is imperative. The successful development and operation of institutions in these areas do require, as we have suggested, the setting-aside of devious and equivocal habits of mind. But in those areas involving the creation of solidarity, the management of tensions, and the expression of intuition and sentiment, criteria of effectiveness would seem to permit, indeed to require considerable reliance on the uses of ambiguity. From this it follows that the wax-and-gold mentality should be regarded not only as an obstacle to Ethiopia's modernization but also, by virtue of its contribution to the continuing effectiveness of her social organization and the continuing richness of her expressive culture, as a beneficial agent.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*175 who trailed the Gondar camp to make spades and plowshares, spears and swords, and so improved the quality of agriculture and warfare in Shoa.

The reign of Abbīyē's son Amhāyas was long and prosperous. New lands were conquered, new settlements founded, new churches built. Amhāyas seized the strategic mountain of Ankobar, to which the mountainous plateaus of the north and the vast plains to the south were equally accessible, and set up his official residence there. The last of Shoa's princes to pay his respects to the court at Gondar, he was received there as an emissary of his father with great honors and treated more like a sovereign ally than a vassal.[27] When Amhāyas died, he left for his son Asfā Wassan what had by then become the vast principality of Shoa.

Asfā Wassan's youth was spent in a monastery in Manz, where he became proficient at composing *qenē* under the tutelage of a master from Gondar. As a ruler, he resembled many of Gondar's monarchs, preferring to spend his time in religious pursuits and the embellishment of his capital (Ankobar) than on the warpath. The actual business of warfare he entrusted to his generals, who in a string of victories subjected dozens of Amhara and Galla districts to his authority. Nevertheless, when forced to fight, he lost no time in showing who was *marīdāzmātch*. When two of his generals rebelled, he defeated them in what Cecchi called "the most terrible and bloody battle which the Shoans remember."[28]

Asfā Wassan deserved his name, which means "Expand the Border." He brought nearly all the petty states of Shoa under his rule, by alliance or by
*175 conquest. A famous exchange of couplets between Asfā Wassan and Ṭedu,
539 governor of Morat, formed the prologue to one instance of this expansion. Ṭedu, fearing the absorption of his territory, made the following rhyme:

Asfā Wassan Yefāt ṭankeraw yerrasu
Morat ṭeduāl belaw ḳamamalālasu.

O Asfā Wassan, stoutly plow Yefāt
Rather than eye what's baking in Morat.

*175 There is gold in the verb in the second line, *ṭeduāl*, which may signify not
538 only "is baking" but also "Ṭedu is there." The couplet may thus be read:
539
• 195 O Asfā Wassan, stoutly plow Yefāt
Rather than think about Ṭedu in Morat.

Upon hearing this couplet Asfā Wassan composed the following reply:

La-moſar la-ḳanbar yamihonaññen
Sālquarṭaw alqerem zandro ṭedun.

To get me yokes and plowbeams in this year
I will not fail to cut the juniper.

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The pun here is on the word *Ṭedu*, for the name of Asfā Wassan's adversary means "the juniper." Morat soon began to pay him tribute.[29]

Asfā Wassan also accomplished much in the field of administration. He organized his realm into four large provinces, which were in turn subdivided into thirty-nine districts—half Amhara lands, half lands taken from the Galla. He improved the laws and introduced a more orderly system of finance. He supported agriculture and encouraged trade.

Such prosperity could scarcely be viewed with indifference by Gondar. Takla Giyorgis I (1779–84), who was trying vainly to restore imperial authority at Gondar, marched to Shoa with a large force. Asfā Wassan, not ready for an open clash with the emperor's troops, handled the situation with characteristic Shoan adroitness. He heaped gifts upon the emperor and his lieutenants. Protesting his fealty, he noted that if he had extended his own dominions, it had been at the expense of their common enemy, the Galla. Finally, he said he was willing to pay tribute to the emperor, but at the same time was ready if necessary to meet him in battle. The lords who accompanied Takla Giyorgis sympathized with the Shoan, and the emperor was not strong enough to prevent their defection.

Worried by a monkish prophecy that his life would be short, Asfā Wassan emptied the state coffers in order to subsidize churches and monasteries. He lived to fill them time and again, during a reign that lasted thirty-three years. Throughout that time he never forgot his church schooling, and frequently invented *qenē* to be repeated in the churches on holidays. But Asfā Wassan was a true son of Manz, and left the memory, as Harris noted, of "a great Nimrod and an unparalleled warrior."[30]

The next ruler, Wassan Sagad, was the offspring of a fortuitous union between Asfā Wassan and Woizero Atmotch Hono, a relative of the imperial family at Gondar and owner of vast properties in Wallo. En route from Manz to Ankobar at the end of his student days, Asfā Wassan was given hospitality at the home of this genteel woman. Not aware that the lady had in fact been brought by his father with the hope of siring offspring from her, Asfā Wassan spent the night with her. When she bore a son, and Asfā Wassan learned who she really was, he fled in terror to the monastery of Ferkutā. After sending scouts to all the monasteries in the area, Amhāyas had his son brought back and granted him pardon.

Wassan Sagad was thus kin to the highest nobility through his mother as well as his father. His noble blood, haughty disposition, and clever mind moved him to great ambitions. He convoked a large assembly of Amhara and Galla, and proclaimed himself Rās of Shoa.* Then he sent word to Rās Gugsa, power behind the throne at Gondar, that he was coming to fight, "for

* *Rās* is the highest ranking secular title in Abyssinia after *negus* ("king"). Cf. chap. v, p. 158.

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793 The *dabtarā*'s way of life is more variable than that of the monk, his possibilities for income more diverse than those of the priest. He may be attached to a church as a chorister and receive a share of the church's revenues, as do the priests. Or he may donate his services to the church and earn his living [212] by secular employment. He may work as a scribe at the court of a king or nobleman. He may spend most of his time teaching, gaining support from some large church or monastery. Like many priests he may cultivate land. [434] In any case, he is likely to derive some income from the sale of amulets and from medical therapies. Some *dabtarā* are even said to have wandered about the country as hunters, performing magical services for clients as they go.

Dabtarā are not set off from the populace by special insignia. Some wind [292] a turban around their heads, as do many priests; but others may dress like ordinary peasants. If holding more prestigious posts they may be seen with fly-whisks or wearing a *barnos*. But they are known by the people, who fear and respect them. They are feared because of their magical powers, which [789] are believed capable of rendering bullets harmless and turning *ǐnjarā* to dust. [554] They are respected because of their learning, for they are the only educated status group in traditional Amhara society. If the commoner's relatively [195] impulsive *manner* of speaking is contrasted with the quiet reserve of the nobility, his relatively simple *language* is contrasted with that of the *dabtarā*, who is noted for a studied and circumspect use of language (*qāla-dabtarā*) and for larding his Amharic with literary (i.e., Ge'ez) expressions (*ya-dabtarā amārīññā*).

793 554 183 In the case of the religious elite, then, status is in all cases achieved. While there is a natural tendency for sons of priests and *dabtarā* to follow their fathers' example, they arrive at the status in question only by fulfilling the same norms that are applied to the sons of laymen. These norms, however, differ among the different groups within the clergy. Investiture by an authority emanating from the seat of religious charisma, the Alexandrine Patriarchate, and the related ritual requirement of marriage with Communion, were the basis of priestly status, almost irrespective of the personal attainments of the candidate. Personal attainments were *all* that mattered, on the other [792] hand, in the case of monk and *dabtarā*, but they differed radically for the two statuses.

793 792 554 The qualifications and characters of monks and *dabtarā* are almost diametrically opposed. The monastic state is entered only by means of a sacred rite; the *dabtarā* is in no way ordained, and might even be a "defrocked" priest. The monk's life is normally given to sensual renunciation; the *dabtarā* is normally an acknowledged sensualist (as appears, for example, in the proverb *ka-mesā ya-talaya dabtarā / yādargāl serā* ["a *dabtarā* who is kept from lunch / will work intrigues"][48] and in stories which celebrate the *dabtarā*'s use of his knowledge for private erotic ends). In the monk the virtue

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155 a matter of course. In the more covert forms of expression, however, insulting
521 is a favorite practice among Amhara. Ambiguous language and obscure
578 allusion make possible a good deal of socially admissible, and admired, insult-
[195] ing. It is chiefly due to his mastery of this genre that the Amhara have come
[554] to idealize Alaqā Gabra Hānnā who, in the words of a psychologically sophisticated Ethiopian informant, by "skillful use of 'wax and gold' has defiled everything that is sacred in Abyssinian tradition: this includes Mother, God, Emperor, and Patriarch, to say nothing of the ignorant clergy, peasantry, and slaves. Gabra Hānnā . . . is the summation of the oral aggressive trend in every Abyssinian, of which the *dabtarā* in the king's court and the singer in the drink-house are only mediocre representations."

155 Wax and gold is, furthermore, the vehicle for the mode of expression which
598 Erikson calls "oral retention." Just as the Amhara tends to be tight-lipped
[195] and evasive when confronted by questions he does not feel like answering, so he finds pleasure in stubbornly withholding his meaning from his audience through employing figures and allusions which no one can understand. This may be understood as a passive form of oral aggression. For the untutored, however, the active aggressive component is probably more satisfying. Most Amhara males look forward to occasions when they can insult with impunity, such as in victory after the games at Christmas or in the setting of a drink-house, where their skillfully improvised verses are repeated and sung by a minstrel. The oral sadistic spirit of this latter scene has been captured with great fidelity by a contemporary Amhara novelist. Describing the moment in a drink-house when the minstrel begins bowing his one-stringed violin and gets ready to accept verses from the crowd, he writes: "*And now every one of them prepares a bullet of verse, and gets cocked to fire veiled insults.*"[18]

155 Two-way communication among Amhara is frequently colored by a biting
521 and intrusive manner as well. Amharic conversation gravitates toward a highly argumentative style. Casual disagreement, or even neutral deliberation over a common problem, often engenders a kind of protracted bickering
[691] to which the Amhara have given an onomatopoetic name, "*çhiqeçhiq*." In its more institutionalized form, this argumentativeness becomes litigation, which has long been regarded as the national sport of Abyssinia.

691 As the primary means of distributing land-use rights and of reducing the
182 likelihood of resort to violence in personal disputes, litigation serves functions of unmistakable importance in Amhara society. Yet the frequency and intensity with which Amhara take part in litigation suggests that it is motivated by non-rational factors in good part. Litigants have often lost many times the original value of some item under dispute in the course of pursuing litigation over it through the courts for many years. The language and colorful gestures of the court may be observed among Amhara in their homes or

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Although women and children do not have so much freedom, the adult male Amhara who chooses to go off by himself for some reason is not bothered. In at least two cases, moreover, the right to solitude is institutionalized: that of the monk or hermit, who is left to his meditation and prayers, and that of the student of *qĕnĕ*, who spends hour after hour in some lonely place composing his verse for the day.

Privacy is further protected among the Amhara by the shared belief that others normally do not have a just claim to information about one's person. Even such superficial matters as one's place of origin or one's family connections are not readily disclosed on a first encounter. This differs markedly from the custom of some other groups in Ethiopia, such as the Borana Galla, among whom it is the first order of business in any conversation to identify the "vital statistics" of one another.

The machinery of wax and gold, again, exists as a useful apparatus with which to protect one's private identity and desires. In authoritarian relations, where the superior questions the subordinate with impunity, this evasive and equivocal manner of response constitutes the latter's main defense against yielding the information sought by the questioner. The superior may feel that he has a right to the information he seeks, but, if he is a good Amhara, he understands that he may never be told the whole truth.

Thus, viewed as a whole, Amhara society does not envelop the individual in a complex network of obligations and constraints. The institutional structure of the society is relatively thin. There are few collectivities to which the individual might belong, and fewer still to which he must belong. He can, if he chooses, live at the very periphery of society—as a hermit, a monk, a *shiftā*, a minstrel, a beggar, or, if a woman, as a solitary householder. For the typical Amhara, the main obligations are to fulfil work responsibilities in behalf of the nuclear family, the parents, and to provide income and services for landlords and chieftains. Here, too, there are important degrees of freedom. An oppressive family situation may be readily relieved by divorce; an oppressive landlord or ruler may possibly be brought to justice over time, or in extreme instances fled from; and for the oppressed vassal or retainer, there is always the alternative of running away to another master or of turning to one's own devices. As a Christian, the Amhara is required to fast a good deal; but attendance at church and membership in religious fraternal associations are voluntary, and for the religious scholar there is considerable freedom of movement.

It is difficult to assess the relative weight of the few but heavy constraints that do exist in Amhara social structure and of the many areas of real independence. But in view of the considerable latitude for unconstrained action that has been described in this section, it would seem valid to characterize

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to change suddenly the whole configuration of battle. He loves to hear, amidst the crackle of rifle-fire, the huzzahs, the shouts, the challenges, the injuries, the encouragements, the allocutions, the piercing voice of the troubadours, and the rhythms of the flutes alternating with the lugubrious wailing of the trumpets; to know, finally, that on the hills, behind their drummers who beat out the charge in place, the two rival chiefs and the two armies are following him with their eyes, and that he may at one moment or another, return to his lord and, hurling before him some trophy, tell him, at the end of his war chant: "There! This is what I know how to do!"[36]

A cult of the individual obtains, in addition, with respect to the man with a genius for outsmarting others. Men who have beguiled their foes with particular cleverness, in litigation or in political intrigues, are scarcely less celebrated than religious virtuosi or heroic warriors. Anecdotes about great feats of shrewdness are the beloved stuff of Abyssinian folk history and are twice told around the fireplace.*[37] Some lords have enjoyed great reputations simply for being such successful and gifted scoundrels.

Cleverness in words counts as much, if not more, than clever deeds. Here we confront once more the phenomenon of wax and gold, but appearing in this context as a sort of finesse in personal relations. It is a question here of individuals made memorable because of their memorable lines, their talent for swiftly and surely employing the ambiguities of Amharic to satirize, at the right moment, some personality, or social type, or aspect of the human condition. Military or political events are often remembered more for the witty verse composed by some personage on the occasion than for their historical significance. In the present century, Naggādrās Tassamā Eshatē has been one of the most outstanding personalities of this sort, as was Alaqā Gabra Hānnā in the nineteenth century.

INDIVIDUALISM AND MODERNITY

The Traditional Pattern

Our inquiry thus far has involved analysis of the various ways in which self-orientation is and is not manifest among the Amhara, in lieu of the more simplistic question of whether Amhara society is individualistic or not. Building on this analysis, we may now attempt a more integrated interpretation of traditional Amhara society.

The predominant tendency in human relations among the Amhara is a disposition to seek, not unity based on affection, understanding, and/or responsi-

* A recent study which analyzed 1,086 stories with identifiable themes, told or written by Ethiopian children in grades two through eight, revealed that "cleverness pays" was by far the most frequently recurring theme.